DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 926 EC 182 710

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TITLE Standards for Excellence: Recommendations for Preschool Special Education Teacher Competencies in New York State.
INSTITUTION New York State Consortium, Centereach.
SPONS AGENCY Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC. Handicapped Children's Early Education Program.
PUB DATE [83]
GRANT G00810062; G007900511; G008000200; G008200740; G008301370
NOTE 18p.; For related document, see EC 182 709.
AVAILABLE FROM Regional Program for Preschool Handicapped Children, Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES, Projects Building, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598 ($1.50).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Development; *Competency Based Teacher Education; Curriculum Development; *Disabilities; Handicap Identification; Individualized Education Programs; *Instruction; Knowledge Level; Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Preschool Education; Referral; Screening Tests; Student Evaluation; Student Placement; Teacher Attitudes; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS New York; *Teacher Competencies

ABSTRACT

The report is designed as a guideline for preservice and inservice teacher education programs and the New York local education agencies providing preschool services to handicapped children. A set of competencies was reviewed, rated and discussed by professionals in the field at two workshops and in consultation with preschool program administrators. Competencies are listed for eight major areas (sample subtopics in parentheses): (1) personal qualities of teachers (warm and positive behavior); (2) knowledge of child development (integrated knowledge of child growth and development sequences); (3) knowledge of early childhood special education (legislation, impacts on the family); (4) identification, screening, and referral (due process and procedural safeguards); (5) assessment (preparation of written reports); (6) individual educational programs (IEP) and placement (effective work with parents); (7) curriculum (development and selection of appropriate materials); and (8) instruction and management (use of the IEP to plan instruction and implementation of the IEP in the classroom setting). (CL)

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STANDARDS FOR EXCELLENCE:

Recommendations for Preschool Special Education Teacher Competencies in New York State

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ABOUT THE NEW YORK STATE CONSORTIUM

In 1981, the New York State Consortium was organized to provide a forum in which professionals who work with handicapped children could exchange ideas and resources and thereby build a structure of better services for the youngsters in their care. Membership of the Consortium include all persons holding Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) grants in the state at that time, as well as new recipients. It is the primary goal of the Consortium to promote the purposes of the federally funded HCEEP effort on the state level. Among these purposes are:

1. *To develop a climate in which professionals can exchange information on the best ways to work with various populations.*

2. *To encourage local and state governments to create policies, laws and regulations favorable to the improvement of services for the handicapped.*

3. *To develop a network of providers of services.*

In addition to these purposes, the Consortium has in its brief history been committed to determining the present level and kind of services offered in the state by various groups involved in early education. By examining current practices, the Consortium has sought to ascertain the present standards that govern services provided to special preschoolers in New York.

In 1983, the NYS Consortium published its first monograph entitled Standards for Excellence: Recommendations for Preschool Special Education in New York State. It was distributed to legislators, state and local education officials and early childhood special education providers.

This second monograph was developed to serve as a guide for preservice and inservice training for teachers working with preschool handicapped children.

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STANDARDS FOR EXCELLENCE: Recommendations for Preschool Special Education Teacher Competencies in New York State is the second in a series of publications developed by the New York State Consortium. This document is designed to serve as a guideline for preservice and inservice teacher training programs and the local education agencies which provide preschool services for children from three to five years of age who have handicapping conditions.

Educators who work with young children need to possess a number of skills which are different from those necessary for teaching school-aged youngsters. Although staff who are employed to teach the young handicapped child may possess New York State certification in Special Education, they may have received no training in working with children under the age of five. Sufficient preservice training has not yet been developed in this relatively new field to meet the growing demand for qualified personnel.

Because of this lack of specific training, the New York State Consortium set as a goal the development of a list of competencies needed by teachers who work with this population. Drs. Frieda Spivack and Ruth F. Gold researched and developed a listing of proposed competencies. These incorporated the best thinking from many sources and represent a consolidation and integration with that of the Consortium. Those competencies which were most commonly deemed essential were included in a pilot survey. They were reviewed, rated and discussed by professionals in the field during two workshops, one in November, 1982 at the New York State Federation of the Council for Exceptional Children, and one in March, 1982 at the Association of New York State Educators of the Emotionally Disturbed conferences. They were also reviewed, rated and discussed in consultations with administrators of preschool special education programs.

Competencies for working with children from birth to three were not included since they have been clearly delineated in the monograph published by WESTAR entitled Basic Competencies for Personnel in Early Intervention Programs (September, 1982).

This document can be used in the following ways:

-- *by preservice training programs to develop, change, and/or strengthen their courses of study;*

-- *by administrators for determining inservice training needs;*

-- *by staff members for self-evaluation of their own strengths and weaknesses.*

A. PERSONAL QUALITIES OF TEACHER

In order to demonstrate qualities appropriate for interacting with young children, their families, the school and community, early special educators should have developed special qualities which relate to "self," "others" and the "professional" role.

Qualities which enable the educator to relate well to others are the result of the dynamic synthesis of personal qualities, abilities and understandings. Professional role qualities also involve the skills and knowledge which develop with experiences on the job, which interact and blend with the qualities of relating to others. A high level of maturity is needed in order to perform with integrity and wisdom in various settings, with different professionals, and to do so also in a highly sensitive and confidential relationship with parents.

A1.0 *Demonstrates personal qualities appropriate for interacting with young children, their families, the school, and community.*

1.1 *Expresses a personal philosophy of teaching which translates into a high level of professional maturity.*

1.2 *Demonstrates ability to evaluate own strengths and weaknesses relevant to self development in education.*

1.3 *Demonstrates respect for each child by treating each child individually and takes responsibility for child change.*

1.4 *Demonstrates oral and written communication and interpersonal skills necessary for interacting as a team member, group leader; liason with a variety of colleagues, professionals, and parents.*

1.5 *Demonstrates commitment to maximizing the strengths of children and their families.*

1.6 *Expresses warm and positive behaviors and translates them to the educational settings.*

a. *Demonstrates sensitivity to needs of parents and culturally diverse groups.*

b. *Recognizes impact of teacher attitudes on feelings and behavior of young children and others.*

c. *Demonstrates ability to interact with others in a natural and accepting manner.*

d. *Demonstrates flexible, calm, and stable behavior in a crisis.*

1.7 Demonstrates ethical behavior

1.8 Demonstrates professional growth through such activities as continuing selfeducation (formal & informal), membership in professional organizations and involvement in community organizations.

B. KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge of child development enables the teacher to recognize which behaviors are developmentally appropriate and which may be the result of handicapping conditions. If too much is expected at a given age, children can develop feelings of inadequacy; if too little, they may be deprived of the opportunity to develop to their potential. Understanding the developmental sequence of normal child growth and developmental milestones in all areas (language, gross and fine motor, cognition, and social/emotional) provides a basis for interventions which address the special problems related to the developmental patterns of the preschooler.

B1.0 Identifies philosophy of child growth and development.

1.1 Identifies theories of child growth and development and their implications for programming in early childhood.

1.2 Recognizes major differences in child rearing practices and views of the child as a functional individual within the various cultural and sociological environments.

1.3 Identifies physiological and environmental processes of child growth and development from conception through early childhood.

1.4 Discusses contributions to the field of child development from an historical perspective.

1.5 Demonstrates knowledge of current research and literature in the field.

B2.0 Demonstrates an integrated knowledge of the sequences of child growth and development (i.e. the interrelationship among cognitive, social-emotional, gross motor, fine motor, language, and play).

2.1 Describes aspects of cognitive development.

a. Identifies major milestones in the acquisition of cognitive skills.

b. Discusses the general stages in the development of thinking, reasoning and problem solving processes.

c. Relates the acquisition of language/communication systems to cognitive development.

d. Discusses the socialization process as it relates to cognitive development.

2.2 *Describes aspects of social-emotional development.*

a. *Identifies general sequences of social-emotional development.*

b. *Describes the acquisition of self-concept, and its impact on the child's development.*

2.3 *Describes aspects of motor development.*

a. *Identifies major milestones in the acquisition of gross motor skills.*

b. *Identifies major milestones in the acquisition of fine motor skills.*

c. *Identifies general sequences of perceptual development and the relationship to overall motor development.*

2.4 *Describes aspects of language development.*

a. *Discusses the acquisition of language/communication systems.*

b. *Identifies major milestones in the acquisition of receptive and expressive language skills (content, form and use).*

2.5 *Describes the implications of play for growth and development.*

a. *Discusses the developmental sequence of play from the social, linguistic, cognitive, and motor aspects.*

B3.0 *Interprets recent research related to child growth and development, and the implications for programming and instruction.*

C. *KNOWLEDGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION*

A new discipline has evolved for the convergence of early childhood and special education. Teachers preparing for more effective intervention for young handicapped children need to know the types and efficacy of past practices and the implications of current research. Knowledge of specialized terminology as well as the theories and roles of the related services and disciplines will enable them to become full participants in an interdisciplinary team.

The early childhood special education teacher must have knowledge of local, state and federal mandates and regulations.

C1.0 Identifies philosophies and theories of early childhood and early childhood special education.

1.1 Discusses the philosophies and theories of early childhood special education from a historical perspective.

1.2 Discusses theories of learning as they apply to early childhood special education.

1.3 Explains within the context of least restrictive environment, the rationale for cross-categorical delivery of services to young handicapped children.

C2.0 Discusses legislation governing early childhood special education.

2.1 Identifies major components of current legislation.

2.2 Discusses educational implications that current legislation holds for the child with exceptional needs (e.g. methods and means of service delivery, implied responsibilities of systems and institutions).

2.3 Explains the impact of PL 94-142 on programs and delivery of service to age 3-5 population.

C3.0 Demonstrates knowledge of hereditary and environmental influences (e.g. nutrition, safety, disease, sexuality, drugs, etc.) on child growth and development from conception through early childhood.

3.1 Demonstrates knowledge of etiologies and characteristics of handicapping conditions (e.g. developmental delays, sensory impairments, orthopedic impairments and other health related impairments).

3.2 Demonstrates knowledge of medical and psychological terms related to specific handicapping conditions.

3.3 Demonstrates knowledge of the effects of handicapping conditions on the language, cognitive, motor and social-emotional development of the child.

C4.0 Describes the impact on the family of having a child with handicapping condition(s).

4.1 Describes the range of emotional reactions experienced by families.

4.2 Discusses alternative coping mechanisms used by families.

4.3 Describes support services available for families of children with handicapping conditions.

C5.0 Interprets research in early childhood education and its implications for programming and instruction in special education.

C6.0 Develops a rationale for early intervention (e.g. cost effectiveness, child progress data, long term impact on child, family and community).

.0 *Demonstrates current knowledge in identification, screening, assessment, and curriculum practices.*

D. *IDENTIFICATION, SCREENING AND REFERRAL*

A special education teacher is most likely to be one of the first contacts with a family. It is imperative that the teacher and others on the screening team demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and fears of the parent as well as the child. They also need to be aware of the cultural differences and adapt themselves to each unique situation and environment as they encounter various lifestyles. The parents should be made to feel that the screening process is taking place to meet their child's needs and provide an appropriate program if needed, not to label the child.

The process from initial contact, through acceptance into an appropriate program needs to be smooth. The parents must feel comfortable and a part of the team, always able to ask any questions and discuss their options.

D1.0 *Describes the purpose, importance and limitations of early identification, screening and referral.*

D2.0 *Demonstrates knowledge of due process procedures and precedural safeguards as they apply to identification, screening and referral.*

D3.0 *Describes procedures to inform the public about young exceptional children.*

3.1 *Identifies the components of a public awareness program.*

3.2 *Identifies the range of services available within a community.*

D4.0 *Demonstrates competency in screening young children for potential handicapping conditions.*

4.1 *Demonstrates knowledge of formal and informal screening procedures and instruments.*

4.2 *Selects valid and reliable screening instruments appropriate to age, population, and setting.*

4.3 *Administers and scores formal screening instruments.*

4.4 *Utilizes information obtained in parent interviews as part of the screening process.*

4.5 *Utilizes observations of child behavior (in addition to test responses) as a component of the overall screening process.*

4.6 *Gathers child information through parent interviews as a component of overall screening.*

4.7 *Interprets and communicates in both written and oral forms, the results of screening activities to other professionals in a clear and concise manner.*

4.8 *Determines with other professionals if further evaluations are indicated on the basis of screening.*

4.9 *Communicates clearly with parents the purposes and results of the screening activities.*

D5.0 *Demonstrates competency in referral processes and procedures for evaluation and related services.*

5.1 *Demonstrates knowledge of the range of public and private service providers.*

5.2 *Identifies appropriate service providers to meet individual child and family needs.*

D6.0 *Explains to parents due process procedures and procedural safeguards as they apply to the process of identification, screening and referral.*

E. ASSESSMENT

Clinical skills are essential for early special educators. They need to be able to use a variety of assessment tools, as well as relate well with each individual child to ensure realistic and accurate results. A teacher may have to test many preschoolers before being comfortable and confident with a specific assessment instrument. In addition to utilizing formal testing instruments, the early special educator needs to be able to assess using informal tools such as observation, classroom performance and some unstructured procedures.

A comprehensive assessment should be compiled by utilizing the clinical judgements of the other professionals on the team involved with the child.

E1.0 *Defines and describes the purpose, importance and limitations of assessments.*

E2.0 *Involves parents in assessment procedures including applicable due process procedures and procedural safeguards.*

E3.0 *Demonstrates competence in the observation-assessment process.*

3.1 *Demonstrates knowledge of formal and informal assessment procedures and selects appropriate instruments to assess the young child.*

3.2 Defines and differentiates formal and informal assessments (formal assessment employs the use of standardized test instruments; informal assessment utilizes teacher designed activities, checklists, observations, interviews, language samples, etc.).

3.3 Utilizes classroom performance for evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.

3.4 Demonstrates ability to conduct parent interviews and utilize information regarding family and child needs.

3.5 Integrates assessment results with evaluation team members and describes the child's skills in each area of development (motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional).

3.6 Identifies characteristics related to handicapping conditions.

3.7 Identifies the difficulties typically encountered in assessment of young children (separation from parent, attention span, and fatigue) and adapts the test instrument and environment in order to assure a fair and accurate assessment of the child's skills and abilities.

3.8 Demonstrates ability to administer and score a range of formal and informal assessment instruments.

3.9 Interprets and communicates assessment results clearly and concisely to evaluation team members and parents in written and oral form.

3.10 Utilizes observation of family-child interactions and child behavior in multiple settings.

E4.0 Prepares written reports that comply with State Standards and which include a description of the child's learning style and skill levels in each developmental area.

F. INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND PLACEMENT

The early childhood special educator is expected to work with parents and other team members to develop an individualized educational plan. The ability to synthesize assessment information and to make recommendations for the type of program which addresses the child's strengths and weaknesses is a critical skill.

F1.0 Utilizes assessment of family needs to determine with parents and other evaluation team members the need for referral to other agencies for additional services.

1.1 Coordinates with the other agencies providing services to a child to insure communication and proper implementation of the IEP.

F2.0 *Demonstrates competence in the development of an individual education program.*

2.1 *Develops the main components of an individual education program (present performance levels, annual goals, short term objectives, etc.).*

2.2 *Utilizes assessment and evaluation information to delineate individual program needs.*

2.3 *Involves parents actively in the development of the individual education program.*

2.4 *Describes the relationships between individual program needs and placement options, identifying the strengths and limitations of each placement alternative.*

2.5 *States intended outcomes for the child in the form of behavioral objectives (state behavior, criterion, and condition in observable, measurable terms).*

2.6 *Demonstrates proficiency in performing task analysis in all developmental areas.*

F3.0 *Works effectively with parents.*

3.1 *Recognizes parent needs.*

3.2 *Helps parents work with their children. (Selection of toys and materials, development of written prescriptions.)*

3.3 *Supports positive interaction between parent and child.*

3.4 *Conducts effective parent discussion groups.*

3.5 *Develops individualized strategies for family participation in the child's educational programs.*

3.6 *Includes goals which are important for the child at home.*

F4.0 *Facilitates the transition of the child into appropriate programs.*

4.1 *Plans and implements a means for periodic review of child's progress involving relevant personnel and parents.*

G. CURRICULUM

Early special educators need to have the knowledge of special materials and curricula and have an understanding of the use of prosthetic and other equipment to facilitate a young child's learning. In addition early special educators should utilize culturally relevant materials and search out resources in the child's community to be incorporated into the curriculum. It is imperative that the teacher use developmentally appropriate curricula and materials for the young exceptional child.

G1.0 Develops and implements curricular strategies appropriate to individual children in individual, small group and large group settings.

1.1 Coordinates the development and implementation of curricular strategies.

1.2 Selects appropriate curricular items based on assessment data and the developmental level of the child.

1.3 Identifies and adapts curricular items to meet the differing learning styles of the young exceptional children.

1.4 Identifies skills which the child will need for success in future, less restrictive environments and design strategies for their establishment.

1.5 Designs curricular strategies to promote skill acquisition simultaneously in more than one developmental area (e.g. while teaching to one skill, such as jumping, reinforce learning of related concepts, such as up or down).

1.6 Demonstrates ability to conduct ongoing evaluation of curricula, using child progress data to verify or modify curricular strategies.

G2.0 Develops and selects materials appropriate to individual children.

2.1 Identifies and secures materials common to the child's natural environment (home, school and community).

2.2 Adapt curricular materials to meet individual needs (e.g. enlarged print for the child with impaired vision).

2.3 Demonstrates skill in designing and constructing appropriate materials.

2.4 Demonstrates ability to conduct ongoing evaluation of materials using child progress data to verify or modify materials.

2.5 Demonstrates ability to evaluate and select appropriate computer hardware and software including adaptive equipment.

G3.0 Develops and uses a structured daily routine which includes: work in language, cognition, self help and motor skills through play, a meal or snack, creative expressive arts, small group work, individual work.

G4.0 Demonstrates skill in evaluating and selecting materials for families (parents and siblings) of young exceptional children.

4.1 Prepares and/or selects materials and activities which parents can use at home to reinforce classroom activities.

H. INSTRUCTION AND MANAGEMENT

Early childhood special educators are specialists in implementing individualized programs within the context of a classroom routine. Flexibility and adaptibility in selection of materials, grouping of children, and expectations based on each child's current level of functioning are necessary skills.

The educator must develop an overall instructional management plan which fosters success and builds self esteem. A variety of strategies and techniques for working with individual special needs children must be utilized to achieve maximum results. Classroom performance should be communicated to parents for successful carryover in the home and community situations.

H1.0 *Demonstrates ability to utilize the IEP to plan instruction with other professionals and parents.*

- 1.1 *Selects appropriate settings (instructional or routine activities at home or at school) and materials to optimize acquisition of skill.*
- 1.2 *Selects instructional activities which secure the child's attention, elicit appropriate responses and provide feedback to the child.*
- 1.3 *Selects instructional procedures which promote independent performance in a variety of settings.*
- 1.4 *Selects and/or develops instructional strategies to be implemented by others, including parents.*
- 1.5 *Selects, develops or adapts means of recording student performance which will indicate program effectiveness without interfering with instruction.*

H2.0 *Demonstrates ability to implement individualized instructional plans in the classroom setting.*

- 2.1 *Develops and modifies daily lesson plans based on assessment and observation.*
- 2.2 *Incorporates related services objectives into the daily instructional plan.*
- 2.3 *Implements teaching procedures in independent activities, one to one sessions, and small or large group interactions. (Including instruction interaction with non-handicapping peers.)*
- 2.4 *Incorporates child initiated learning experiences (e.g. reinforce spontaneous responses) into ongoing instruction.*
- 2.5 *Groups children according to appropriate criteria.*

2.6 *Demonstrates ability to instruct parents and other personnel in effective teaching practices.*

H3.0 *Uses appropriate child management strategies for young exceptional children.*

3.1 *Selects procedures to facilitate development of appropriate social behaviors.*

3.2 *Establishes and maintains appropriate social behaviors utilizing management procedures in individual and group situations.*

3.3 *Uses class rules, a structured routine prevention technique, and positive social reinforcement to dissipate behavior problems.*

3.4 *Supervises entire classroom setting while interacting with an individual or small group.*

3.5 *Conducts lessons of appropriate length related to attention span.*

3.6 *Facilitates smooth and efficient transition between activities.*

3.7 *Demonstrates organized, yet flexible, classroom teaching.*

3.8 *Balances between child and teacher centered involvement.*

H4.0 *Maintains a safe, efficient, stimulating, esthetically pleasing and secure environment.*

H5.0 *Demonstrates ability to evaluate instruction and child management procedures with other personnel and parents.*

5.1 *Utilizes ongoing assessment of child progress to evaluate instructional and management procedures.*

5.2 *Verifies or modifies instruction and management procedures on the basis of child progress data.*

5.3 *Modifies instructional program in response to daily data selection and evaluation.*

H6.0 *Demonstrates organizationsl skills (e.g. recordkeeping, scheduling).*

6.1 *Collects and maintains appropriate data needed by supervisors and administrators.*

6.2 *Collects data for own formative and summative classroom program evaluation.*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TADS, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill for sharing the materials from special educators and universities across the nation which were used in the development of these competencies.

This work was developed as a collaborative effort under Grant Nos. G007900511, G008000200, G00810062, G008200740, G008301370 from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education through Handicapped Children's Early Education Programs.

However, the content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of that agency and no official endorsement of this material should be inferred.

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